

Feb. 18, 2016

My name is Ann Cushion and I live in West Haven, Connecticut.

I am testifying to ask for restoration of funding to the state's Tobacco & Health Trust Fund (THTF).

I am a 42 year employee of the American Cancer Society. I have always believed in our mission of saving more lives from cancer. My story goes beyond my job... I live the mission of the American Cancer Society. Forty-five years ago, I lost my cousin to leukemia, and my Dad to liver cancer 32 years ago. Their fight inspired me to do my best to make a difference in the lives of cancer patients. In 2004 I was diagnosed with tonsil cancer. I knew I had to be strong for my daughter, my Mom, and my fiancé, because they needed me to be brave and show that I could not only win my fight, but thrive. They, along with my family, friends, and my American Cancer Society family, were my strength and support through my battle. Everyone was so proud of me, especially my fiancé John, since he had lost both his parents, his brother, and his previous fiancé to cancer. I made a promise to him that I would beat this disease; that I would not be the fifth person he loved to die from cancer. Six years after I was diagnosed, my beloved fiancé, John was diagnosed with lung cancer. Now I was the caregiver; I told him he needed to make the same promise to me – to fight and win his battle. After a grueling round of chemotherapy and radiation treatments, he was in remission. Unfortunately, his cancer quickly returned, and he passed away nearly five years ago on April 27, 2011, nine months from the day of his diagnosis. I am heartbroken every day that he is gone, along with our dreams of getting married and growing old together. If John had quit smoking earlier, perhaps he would still be with me. This is why YOUR support is so very important. I am very proud of the work I do with the American Cancer Society, making a difference in the fight to end this disease... Won't you please make a difference also, and help us finish the fight?

Connecticut receives nearly \$500 million annually between the MSA funds and tobacco tax revenue. Over the years, however, less than 1% of the cumulative total has been spent in support of smoking cessation services. In 2013 we spent \$6 million on tobacco control, however for 2014 and 2015 that number was cut in half. And now for 2017, \$0 is budgeted to the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund (THTF).

Please restore the \$12 million transfer of funds to the state's Tobacco & Health Trust Fund (THTF). We need to spend more on tobacco control programs in the state not less. It is very difficult to break the addiction to tobacco but programs like the state Quitline help smokers quit. States that have funded tobacco control have indeed seen results: in California, lung cancer rates declined by a third between 1988 and 2011. Without funding for effective cessation programs here in Connecticut, I worry that many more people will lose loved ones, like I lost John.

Thank you for your time and considering my request.